

The Road Not Taken

by manga

Category: Rurouni Kenshin

Language: English

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2000-05-01 08:00:00

Updated: 2000-05-01 08:00:00

Packaged: 2016-04-27 15:53:31

Rating: K

Chapters: 1

Words: 1,120

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: My response (with intentions for revision) to a challenge posted to the RKfanfic list: to write a story illustrating that Kaoru is better for Kenshin than Tomoe was. (Note: not Tomoe-negative at all. I kind of like her.)

The Road Not Taken

The Road Not Taken.

by manga, the Awesome One in pigtails.

* * *

>
 Note: this takes place just after the Jinchuu arc, when everyone's home safely but not quite soundly yet. Kenshin was rather thoroughly beaten up, not to mention the damage he did to himself sitting in Rakunimura.

"Two roads diverged in wood and I... I took the one less traveled by, and that has made all the difference."

> Robert Frost. <p>

* * *

>
 Kaoru watched worriedly as Kenshin tossed restlessly. He turned over, muttering something fiercely, and scowled, throwing the thin blanket off entirely. For a moment, he was more peaceful, but then he began shivering and fidgeting again. She looked sadly down at him laying there; his slight frame, made all the more thinner from weeks of starving himself in Rakuninmura, was covered with bandages. His long red hair clung to his bare back in matted, sweaty clumps. He whimpered softly as he curled himself painfully tight against the wracking cold he felt.

"Megumi-san..." Kaoru lifted pleading blue eyes to the coolly elegant woman doctor sitting on Kenshin's other side.

"I've done all I can, Kaoru-chan," Megumi responded quietly. "His stay in Rakuninmura weakened him greatly. He shouldn't have fought Enishi in that state, but there was no choice. Hopefully, the peace he has now will enable him to fight off this fever."

Kaoru nodded sadly, then reached out and picked up the small cloth that had fallen off of Kenshin's head. She dipped it into the nearby bucket of cool water and wrung it out again before placing it back on Kenshin's forehead. Her hand remained there for a moment, gently caressing his face. "It's all right now, Kenshin. I'm here. Please come back..." she whispered.

Out of the swirling mass of blackness, fractured bits of memories and hallucinations, Kenshin saw a humble farm house form. A sharp winter breeze blew his hair back, clearing away the fever dreams. The air he could smell was crisp, wet with snow and sweet with the scent of white plums.

White plums...? he thought in a mix of confusion and surprise.

"Kenshin. I'm here."

Stepping forward, he saw Tomoe standing in the door of the house. With a small jolt, he recognized it as the place that had been their home. It was only a small jolt, though, and it did not bring with it the anguish, longing and self-recrimination that he half expected. "Tomoe..." he smiled.

"You're smiling again," she said with small, soft smile of her own.

"Yeah." He blinked, surprised by this turn of conversation.

"I'm glad. You should smile more. Be happy, Kenshin. Don't hold back anymore."

"I don't!" he protested.

Tomoe shook her head. "Then why are you here?" His mouth open and closed a few times, but he was at a loss. "It's not that you love Kaoru any less," Tomoe explained. "Part of you still wonders 'what if?' and still wishes 'if only'. You wonder about the road not taken." Briefly the wind picked up, playing idly with the brilliant red strands of his hair as he stared silently at her.

"Perhaps you're right," he acknowledged at length. "But then, isn't that normal? It's a natural consequence of living. You make choices, and always wonder about the outcome of the choices you didn't make."

"This is true," she nodded. "But... come. See. And then be happy." So saying, she stepped forward and placed her hands on either side of his face. With the touch of her hands, he saw. He -saw- the life he might have had stretched out before him. Tomoe, the village they lived in and the children he played with... It was very nice. Simple and peaceful. But something was missing. He found himself missing the energy of the friends he'd made in the Kamiya dojo.

"Do you understand now?" Kenshin blinked and saw Tomoe and the shack

in front of him again.

"Yes... Yes. I do. Tomoe, thank you."

The first thing Kenshin saw when he opened his eyes again was the ceiling. The second thing he saw was Kaoru sitting by his side, her eyes closed and her head drooping as she dozed. Morning light shone through the windows and the shoji. "Ohayo," he tried to say as he raised himself up on his good arm, but his throat was dry, making him cough instead. Kaoru's eyes snapped open and an instant later he was bowled over by her enthusiastic hug.

"Kenshin!" she cried happily, tears squeezing from the corners of her eyes.

"Oro..., " he gasped. "Kaoru... need to breathe..."

"Gomen!" Embarrassed, she released him. Gratefully he took several deep breaths, then smiled at her.

"Why the tears?" he asked, reaching out and brushing them off of her cheek.

"I'm so glad you're all right. I was so worried." She scowled at him for a moment. "Kenshin, you're not supposed to worry me!"

"Sumimasen, Kaoru." Sitting up, he reached out and pulled her into an embrace.

"I was so worried..." she whispered into his chest. "The fever wouldn't break, and you were tossing and turning and then you were so frighteningly still..."

"Ssh," he whispered back gently. "I'm all right now. I... had a special dream."

The small smile on his face tinged with sadness... she had a good guess.

"Tomoe-san?" she asked unhappily.

"Yes. What's wrong?"

"...Nothing." Kaoru forced a smile. "I'm glad that you're not so sad about her anymore."

Kenshin sighed and held her tighter. "She helped me to understand something. Kaoru... I needed her, back then. Her peace freed me. But you... I need your brightness, your life. Without her, I don't think I could appreciate you. But without you, I couldn't appreciate life. You finish what she started." Taking a deep breath, he continued. "... You complete -me-." Tipping her head up with one finger, he stared earnestly into her big blue eyes. "Kaoru, I love you. You don't need to feel jealous of Tomoe."

"I- I'm not jealous," Kaoru stammered, blushing. Her head was whirling. He'd called her 'Kaoru' -three- times! Without the distancing '-dono'! And he'd told her he loved her! He could take her obi and fly her like a kite she was so happy. She beamed up at him

and threw her arms around his neck. "Kenshin..." she sighed into his ear happily, "if this turns out to be another fever dream I'm going to hurt you."

"No," he laughed, pulling back and smiling at her. "It's not. We're both really home now."

End
file.